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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 002000

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/03/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ES](#)
SUBJECT: MINISTER OF PUBLIC SECURITY BECOMES THIRD DECLARED
CANDIDATE

REF: A. SAN SALVADOR 01959
[1](#)B. SAN SALVADOR 01485

Classified By: DCM Michael A. Butler under E.O. 12958 reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

1.(U) Rene Figueroa, El Salvador's Minister of Public Security, has announced his possible candidacy for the ARENA party's nomination for President in the 2009 election. Figueroa made his announcement at the 2007 ARENA General Assembly held on September 29. His statement closely followed a similar announcement by Ana Vilma de Escobar, El Salvador's Vice President on September 27 (ref A). President Saca publicly reiterated that there are will be no pre-candidates announced until May 2008.

2.(C) ARENA Advisor Guillermo Wellman has told us that other potential ARENA candidates include Minister of Foreign Affairs Francisco Esteban Lainez, Minister of Public Works Jorge Nieto, Vice President of Campaigns for ARENA's Executive Council Hugo Barrera, and President of the National Administration of Aqueducts and Sewers Cesar Funes. Other ARENA sources indicate that businessman and longtime party activist Roberto Murray Meza is receiving strong consideration for the presidential slot.

3.(U) The September 29 ARENA Assembly also reelected all the members of the Executive Council (COENA); however, some of the members will be shifting portfolios.

4.(C) COMMENT: A long-time ARENA stalwart, Figueroa is considered by many to have earned the opportunity to head the ticket. Others within the party, including former President Armando Calderon Sol, have publicly expressed trepidation about a Figueroa candidacy. One member of the COENA inner circle, as well as several campaign followers, have indicated to Poloff that the upper ranks of ARENA feel that while Figueroa would be an excellent President, he lacks the personal charisma to connect with voters in the rough and tumble "camisa sudada" (literally sweaty shirt) campaign style favored by President Saca and others.

5.(C) Moreover, Figueroa is seen by some as a hard-core ARENA conservative, likely to alienate centrist voters and thus exacerbate the polarization of Salvadoran politics in the 2009 election, potentially providing an opportunity to a (Mauricio) Funes FMLN candidacy. This, combined with Figueroa's strong association with the politically-difficult public security and justice portfolio, let alone controversial events such as the Suchitoto confrontation (ref B) and arrests, leads some ARENA members to prefer a candidate carrying less political baggage into the campaign trail. END COMMENT.

Glazer